

stop, come back, stay with me - (please)

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Barazo introduces his daughter to one of his patients. Things go well, as they always (never) do.

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Chapter 1

The first time they meet is when the doctor introduces them to each other. She remembers - three thirty six in the afternoon.

"Ryuko, this is my daughter, Mako! I figured you feel lonely being by yourself all the time, so Mako'll keep you company. Won't you?" Then he glanced down at the short brunette, who nodded excitedly at the prospect of a new friend.

Ryuko nodded at Barazo, but with much less enthusiasm. He shouldn't have - literally. She didn't feel lonely anyway, but she can deal with it.

Barazo left the two of them together for the rest of the day until he came back to fetch Mako. The girl was loud, talkative, and somewhat annoying, but bearable. Ryuko just had to tolerate her for a little bit; Barazo would see they didn't get along that well, or Mako herself would start complaining. Right?

Ryuko had thought wrong.

The next day, she came over again, much to Ryuko's chagrin. To both of their surprise, though, Ryuko had actually started participating in the conversations Mako brought up, and the brunette yelled a "see you tomorrow!" before leaving with her father.

The silence, although Ryuko was used to it, made her feel a little lonely.

It continued on like that for a while. Barazo would bring Mako over everyday, barring the times she needed the nurses to check on her condition, and Ryuko found herself unconsciously watching the clock tick to the minutes until the usual time Mako would enter the room. Ryuko found herself growing fonder and fonder of the brunette's

presence, and she felt that Mako was liking her more too, because she started coming over by herself after two weeks.

Mako kissed her first, after an excruciatingly long amount of time staring at Ryuko's mouth. The black-haired teen didn't know what was happening at first when Mako suddenly crawled on her bed and cupped her cheeks, but when she drew their faces closer, she obliged eagerly.

Mako's lips were sweet. She remembers - seven forty one in the evening. Thank God it hadn't been in the morning because Ryuko only brushes her teeth at nine. Or ten, if she got lazy.

Then when the two of them pulled away, a thin string of saliva connecting them, Ryuko opened her mouth to say something. Mako cut her off with another kiss, then another, and another before Ryuko broke away, laughing.

That was also the first night Mako slept by Ryuko's side. The black-haired teen hadn't known it would feel so good with the brunette's warm body pressed against hers.

She remembers - five twenty six in the afternoon. Mako had valiantly declared; "Let's go on a date when you get better, Ryuko-chan! Don't say no!"

She had chuckled, said yes, and squeezed Mako in a tight mutual hug. It warmed her when Mako had said 'when' instead of 'if'. It'd been a long time since she had someone be like that to her.

Then Barazo said she needed a surgery and it felt like her whole world came crashing down.

She didn't *want* to cry. Especially not in front of Mako. But she had no idea why on earth she would cry over something like this. When she had been admitted to the hospital, she'd already accepted that she had little to no chance of surviving. She had come to terms that her life would very likely end.

But now she didn't *want* to die. Ryuko didn't want to die anymore. Well, not that she did want to die in the first place, but she definitely didn't have much reason to live anyway. So if she had to put it in a phrase... Ryuko supposed it was like she had a reason to live.

... Mako was her reason to live.

She wanted to live. Not for herself, but for Mako. She didn't want to see Mako's devastated face if she died. She didn't want Mako to cry over her. She did not, under any circumstances, want to make Mako sad. *Ever* .

So there was only one possible outcome to this surgery that she would allow: Ryuko Matoi was going to *live* . And she wouldn't have it any other way.

She remembers when she made that conclusion: three thirty in the morning, six hours after Barazo's announcement. She was supposed to have slept at ten.

Judging by Mako's crying face the very next day, Ryuko supposed she had heard the news. The brunette stayed with Ryuko for the rest of the day, saying just about anything she could possibly say and trying not to burst into tears again when she looked at Ryuko's face.

So while Ryuko does not remember what time she was taken away for the surgery, she does remember how many times Mako shouted her name in a desperate, yet futile, plea to come back.

Twelve times. Then she turned the corner and shut out all noise. She doesn't know how many times Mako whispered her name and that she cried herself to sleep long after twelve.

The last thing she remembers was at three thirty six in the afternoon. Ryuko almost laughed; the same time everything began.

Then it's just black, and the face of the one who gave her hope.

